



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Mother Lode Field Office

5152 Hillsdale Circle

El Dorado Hills, CA 95762

www.blm.gov/ca/motherlode

Squirrel Creek Pine Beetle Salvage (CA-180-11-37) Finding of No Significant Impact August 2011

It is my determination that this decision will not result in significant impacts to the quality of the human environment. Anticipated impacts are within the range of impacts addressed in the Sierra Resource Management Plan (RMP)/Final Environmental Impact Statement. The proposed action does not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary and will not be prepared. This conclusion is based on my consideration of CEQ's following criteria for significance (40 CFR §1508.27), regarding the context and intensity of the impacts described in the EA, and based on my understanding of the project:

- 1) *Impacts can be both beneficial and adverse and a significant effect may exist regardless of the perceived balance of effects.* Potential impacts include negligible soil disturbance caused by the use of heavy equipment. However, none of these impacts would be significant at the local or regional scale (cumulatively) because of the small scale of the proposed action and the project design features incorporated into the proposed action.
- 2) *The degree of the impact on public health or safety.* No aspects of the proposed action have been identified as having the potential to significantly and adversely impact public health or safety.
- 3) *Unique characteristics of the geographic area.* The area affected by the proposed action has ACEC values. Soils and vegetation are atypical of the elevation and terrain in the central Sierra Nevada foothills. The ACEC values would not be negatively affected. The salvage would help prevent the spread of beetles to surrounding conifers within the ACEC, helping to keep the vegetation community healthy.
- 4) *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial effects.* No anticipated effects have been identified that are scientifically controversial. As a factor for determining within the meaning of 40 C.F.R. § 1508.27(b)(4) whether or not to prepare a detailed environmental impact statement, "controversy" is not equated with "the existence of opposition to a use." *Northwest Environmental Defense Center v. Bonneville Power Administration*, 117 F.3d 1520, 1536 (9th Cir. 1997). "The term 'highly controversial' refers to instances in which 'a substantial dispute exists as to the size, nature, or effect of the major federal action rather than the mere existence of opposition to a use.'" *Hells Canyon Preservation Council v. Jacoby*, 9 F.Supp.2d 1216, 1242 (D. Or. 1998).
- 5) *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are likely to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.* The analysis does not show that the proposed action would involve any unique or unknown risks.

6) *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.* The BLM undertakes these types of projects on a regular basis.

7) *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.* No significant cumulative impacts have been identified. The proposed action is consistent with the actions and impacts anticipated in the Sierra RMP.

8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect National Historic Register listed or eligible to be listed sites or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.* The proposed action would not affect cultural resources listed on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect ESA listed species or critical habitat.* No ESA listed species (or their habitat) would be affected by the proposed action.

10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of environmental protection law or requirements.* There is no indication that this decision would result in actions that would threaten such a violation.

William S. Haigh
Field Manager, Mother Lode Field Office

Date



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EA Number: CA-180-11-37

Proposed Action: Squirrel Creek Pine Beetle Salvage

Location: MDM, T 16 N, R 8 E Sec 29

1.0 Purpose of and Need for Action

1.1 Need for Action

On October 9, 2010 a landowner contacted the Mother Lode Field Office (BLM) about small groups of Ponderosa pines that are dead or dying on BLM-administered land immediately adjacent to his private property. The project area is approximately five acres and is located three miles west of Grass Valley. There are multiple pockets of trees, totaling 100 trees, infested with pine beetles. Immediate removal of the infested trees would capture a minimal value in timber, reduce chances in spread of the insect infestation, and reduce hazardous fuel loading.

1.2 Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plans

The proposed action is consistent with the Sierra Resource Management Plan Record of Decision (ROD), approved in February 2008. On page 22 of the ROD it states, "Salvage harvest timber damaged from disease, insects, fire, etc."

2.0 Proposed Action and Alternatives

2.1 Proposed Action

Under the proposed action, the BLM would authorize the salvage harvest an est. 50 MBF of dead or dying timber infested with Mountain Pine Beetle (*Dendroctonus ponderosae*). Salvage would take place over an area approximately five acres in size. Yarding would be done by tractor or rubber tired skidder. Salvage would not require any new road construction. Existing roads and a landing presently available would be used. Trails would be created by the use of heavy equipment moving from the landing to the harvest areas and back. The minimal amount of trails would be needed and all trails would be rehabbed after use. (Refer to the attached *Timber Contract - Special Stipulations - Sec.41* which specify stipulations for proposed action.)

Slash produced from the proposed action would be either lopped/scattered, or chipped/scattered. The methods used would be dependent on accessibility, fire hazard, and other site and natural resource conditions. Slash disposal stipulations are outlined on page 4 of the attached *Contract Stipulations* and may be modified to meet any new conditions arising during operations.

2.2 Project Design Features

No operations of any kind shall be conducted between October 15th and May 15th.

Cultural resources identified by the BLM archaeologist will be flagged and will be avoided.

The project site will be accessed from the west by a private landowner avoiding impacts to known occurrences of federally listed plant species and ACEC values.

To manage the potential for noxious weeds, especially Scotch Broom, machinery and equipment, including boots, will be cleaned of adhering soil and seeds prior to every entry into the site. Soil disturbance will be minimized and Scotch broom plants near target trees will be hand pulled to discourage re-sprouting in the disturbed areas.

2.3 No Action

Under the No Action Alternative the area would be managed as it is presently. No salvage would take place.

2.4 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

BLM did not consider any other alternatives in detailed analysis

3.0 Affected Environment

Cultural, botanical, and wildlife field inventories were performed by the BLM staff specialists in May 2011. The area potentially affected by the proposed action is approximately 5 acres of BLM-administered land located off of Squirrel Creek Road, three air miles west of the town of Grass Valley, in the central Sierra Nevada foothills. Topography is generally flat and the elevation within the project area is 2300 feet above sea level.

The project area contains a *Pinus ponderosa* Forest Alliance (Sawyer et al 2008). Ponderosa pine dominates the canopy with occasional *Quercus kelloggii* (black oak). The herbaceous layer is mostly *Chamaebatia foliolosa* (mountain misery) with some *Toxicodendron diversilobum* (poison oak) and several small patches of *Cytisus scoparius* (Scotch broom).

This project is within the boundary of the Deadman's Flat ACEC. The important and relevant values for this ACEC include: gabbro; massive diabase and serpentine substrates with Secca and Dubakella soils supporting leather oak chaparral and a diverse chaparral resembling northern gabbroic mixed chaparral; one federally endangered plant species, *Calystegia stebbinsii* (Stebbins' morning glory); and a dwarf *Fremontodendron* closely related to another federally endangered species, Pine Hill flannelbush. Analysis has determined that these values will not be impacted by the proposed project. The relevant and important values of the Deadman's Flat ACEC are located within the xeric chaparral to the east of the ponderosa pine stand. The ponderosa pine stand and more specifically, the 100 trees marked for removal, were surveyed for ACEC values by BLM specialists. The survey was completed in June of 2011; it was timed to coincide with flowering of the special status species for optimal identification and location. No important and relevant values or habitat for those values were identified. Access to the project site is through private property and will not impact special status plant species. If during the project work ACEC values or special status plants are identified, work will immediately stop and the newly identified resource will be studied.

4.0 Environmental Effects

The following critical elements have been considered for this environmental assessment, and unless specifically mentioned later in this EA, have been determined to be unaffected by the proposed action: air quality, prime/unique farmlands, floodplains, water quality, hazardous waste, wetlands and riparian zones, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness, and environmental justice.

4.1 Impacts of the Proposed Action and Alternatives

The proposed action would not impact atmospheric, water, or soil resources. There are small seasonal streams in the area. The project area is not located on a major stream. The area that would be treated is relatively small in size. Use of a heavy equipment is expected to cause little soil disturbance. Vehicle barriers such as cables, berms, and large boulders may be placed at strategic locations to prevent dirt bikes and other off-highway vehicles from driving within the treated area and causing erosion problems.

The BLM botanist has conducted a botanical study of the project area. They conducted a field inventory in month/year when conditions were near optimal for plant identification within the project area. The study is designed to help BLM meet its obligations under the Endangered Species Act and other authorities. No federally listed or other special status plants were identified within the project area.

The BLM wildlife biologist has analyzed the impacts of the proposed action on wildlife, especially on special status wildlife. Her analysis is designed to help BLM meet its obligations under the Endangered Species Act and other authorities. No federally listed or other special status wildlife were identified within the project area.

The BLM archaeologist analyzed the impacts of the proposed action on cultural resources. The study included background records search, field inventory, and Native American consultation. The study is designed to help BLM meet its obligations under Section 106 of the Historic Preservation Act and other authorities. One cultural resource would be flagged for avoidance. The BLM archaeologist recommends that no significant cultural resources would be affected by the proposed action (refer to the Section 106 compliance study attached).

The proposed action could have negligible short-term impacts on recreational use. Hunters and motorists might be inconvenienced temporarily during project implementation due to the noise and dust caused by harvesting dead and dying timber. Recreationists would continue to use the project area after the proposed action is implemented.

The project area is not known for its visual resources. The proposed project would have a negligible impact on visual resources. Some dead and dying trees would be removed. The harvested area would not be visible, except by the air. It would not, for example, mar the scenic beauty of a river canyon. The proposed action is in line with BLM's VRM class III management objective which is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape.

4.2 Impacts of the No Action Alternative

The dead trees would deteriorate, fall to the ground, and contribute to hazardous fuels. Not removing the infested trees would create potential for an increase and spread of harmful insects to adjacent trees on private land. Having patches of dead trees would create a visual eyesore to adjacent private land owners and would reflect negatively on the BLM as good land stewards.

4.3 Cumulative Impacts

Because of the small size of this project, no cumulative impacts are anticipated.

5.0 Agencies and Persons Consulted

See 5.1

5.1 BLM Interdisciplinary Team

Reviewers:

/s/ James Barnes

NEPA coordinator/Archaeologist

/s/ Keith Johnson

Forester

/s/ Lauren Fety

Botanist

/s/ Peggy Cranston

Wildlife/Fisheries biologist

5.2 Availability of Document and Comment Procedures

This EA, posted on Mother Lode Field Office's website (www.blm.gov/ca/motherlode) under Information, NEPA (or available upon request), will be available for a 15-day public review period. Comments should be sent to the Mother Lode Field Office, 5152 Hillsdale Circle, El Dorado Hills, CA 95762 or emailed to us at jjbarnes@blm.gov